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# **[GOOD TO GREAT CHURCH PLANTING: ACCELERATING GROWTH AND EFFECTIVENESS IN CHURCH PLANTING]**

## Good to Great Church Planting – accelerating your growth and influence in church planting

What will make your church move from being good at planting churches, to being great?

How can you ...  
    build momentum,  
    bring about multiplication  
    and become a movement ...  
in order to accelerate your church-planting ability and increase your Kingdom impact?

This concept paper identifies principles that churches and networks across Northern, Western, Central and Eastern Europe are using as they transition from being good church-planting churches to becoming great church-planting movements. Some are working within the context of the historical reformed Anglican and Lutheran churches. Others train church planters or facilitate church planting amongst a variety of denominations. Collectively they have planted more than 340 churches and missional communities since August 2007 and they are on track to plant many more.

### ***The Flywheel and the Inflection Point***

This phenomenal progress isn't achieved overnight however. It is the accumulation of many strategic leadership decisions within each church or network which build together over time to create a momentum of their own.

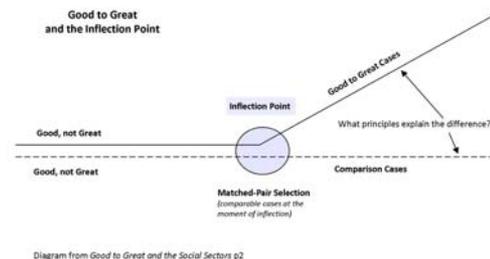
Their experiences are similar to those described by Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*<sup>1</sup>. Collins and his team spent nearly five years analysing successful and not so successful businesses in order to discover the factors that allowed some companies to outperform their closest competitors over a period of time. This book, along with the monograph *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*<sup>2</sup>, is now widely read by church leaders who are looking to build great churches.

***Progress ... is the accumulation of many strategic leadership decisions which build together***

The momentum built up by many small changes is like that of a flywheel – a large rotating disc mounted on an axle. The first push takes effort, but the more times it is pushed round, the more speed is built up.

*No matter how dramatic the end result, the good-to-great transformations never happened in one fell swoop. There was no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no wrenching revolution. Good to great comes about by a cumulative process – step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel – that adds up to sustained and spectacular results.*<sup>3</sup>

There comes a point when the momentum created by turning the flywheel takes over, and great speed is sustained with no more effort than in the beginning. Collins calls this point the *breakthrough*, but recognises that there is a period of *build-up* to that point.



*Collins analysed the differences between companies experiencing an inflection point, and companies which did not.*

The breakthrough is also known as *the inflection point* – a phrase coined by Andy Grove, founding partner and CEO of Intel as “a time in the life of a business when

its fundamentals are about to change”.<sup>4</sup> An alternative definition includes the time when an organisation:

- changes its strategy to pursue a different direction and avoid the risk of decline
- is able to recognise and adapt to change factors of major significance.<sup>5</sup>

Inflection points occur through a considered change in strategy within the organisation, or in response to external circumstances. They are also the point at which you *stop* something – for example an action or attitude, and *start* something else.



*Alpha at Holy Trinity Brompton – a movement which now has worldwide influence*

The international growth of Holy Trinity Brompton’s Alpha course show how stopping one activity and starting another creates inflection points, as Miles Toulmin of Holy Trinity Brompton explains. Each stage represents an inflection point, and a movement towards Alpha’s international reach and effectiveness.

- *Stopped* thinking of Alpha just as a discipleship tool, and *started* thinking of it as an evangelism tool
- *Stopped* thinking of Alpha just for Holy Trinity Brompton and its network and *started* thinking of it as a global tool that could take the Gospel around the world
- *Stopped* thinking that it had to be Holy Trinity Brompton that took Alpha to the world and *started* thinking that it could go from everywhere to everywhere, so now churches from Australia go out and

do global training; in Argentina churches are taking it to Peru, and churches in Peru are taking it to Ecuador.

The following stages are observed in the work of the churches and networks featured in this paper, as they move to greater effectiveness in church planting:

1. Finding an outward focus
2. Implementing the vision
3. Building momentum
4. Generating national and international influence.

### **1. Finding an outward focus**

The first inflection point experienced by a church-planting church or organisation often revolves around the focus of the organisation. Is it inward or outward looking – concerned only with internal issues or focussing on reaching out beyond its own organisation?

Marcus Hausner, regional leader of Vineyard D.A.CH<sup>6</sup> ([www.vineyard-dach.net](http://www.vineyard-dach.net)) remembers the time when church life tended to focus on the experience of the Holy Spirit. Influenced by Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner of the Church Growth Movement, he says they went to a more extrovert attitude where they felt it was time to touch the country, and that church planting rather than campaigns or crusades would be most effective in terms of evangelism.

“We started doing roadshows with conferences and seminars about church planting and leadership,” says Marcus. “We weren’t necessarily being strategic but through spreading the message, we found people who felt attracted to this and started to build a sense of family within the German speaking world.” From an initial three churches, they have planted sixteen Vineyard D.A.CH churches across Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Some are “classic” plants which have

begun from small groups growing into Sunday services, whilst others, for example in East Berlin, are working alongside established state churches.<sup>7</sup>

An outward focus was created for ejw (Evangelisches Jugendwerk in Württemberg: [www.ejwue.de](http://www.ejwue.de)), a youth movement working alongside the Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Southern Germany, when numbers of young people attending their bible studies and bible groups started to decline.



*Ejw has planted eight youth churches, reaching young people across South-West Germany*

“The bible groups just declined – it wasn’t a decision, but we needed something else,” explains Reinhold Krebs, regional youth worker with ejw. “We decided not to focus on this branch so much and instead to focus more on youth services. It wasn’t a very clear concept at the time – but we saw it as an open door and went through it.”

When the services at some local places took place every two weeks, instead of monthly or quarterly, young people started to think of them as ‘church’ instead of an event. This accelerated the concept of youth churches. Between 2003 and 2006, four ejw-linked youth churches received funding from the synod as a project. At the end of this time two churches folded, but since then a further six youth churches have begun, as the

concept has gained acceptance within the Lutheran church.

Reinhold says that creating and maintaining an outward focus has taken time, partly because they are working within the traditional church. The annual network camps, which now concentrate on youth churches, have played a significant role in inspiring young leaders, as has a new monthly ‘huddle’ for a dozen of ejw’s professional youth workers, where they meet over lunch with time for personal input and discussing strategic issues.

“This personal network helps a lot,” says Reinhold. “The amazing thing is that normally you have to beg staff to attend meetings because they are so busy. But the professional youth workers are asking us if they can come to the meeting! We are starting a second group – I think it is the core of our movement at the moment.”

The creation of the Antioch Movement in Ukraine helped whole denominations create an outward focus as they began to work together. In the early 1990s, with the beginnings of religious freedom after the fall of Communism in Ukraine, denominations planted churches independently of each other. Victor Kulbich of the Antioch Movement was involved in training church planters. After meeting Dwight Smith, founder of Saturation Church Planting International ([www.scp.org](http://www.scp.org)) in 1996<sup>8</sup>, he and Dwight worked together to help Baptist, Pentecostal and independent church leaders to understand more about multiplying churches.

“When Dwight came, he brought a new vision based on the experiences of church planting multiplication. It was a revolutionary thought that the main role of the church is to give birth to daughter churches, and everything God wants to do he will use his church to do,” says Victor.

Victor says they tried to identify churches and people who God was already speaking to, with a sense of ownership about their geography. “When we went into an area we would ask ‘what does God want for your area, and what will it look like in your lifetime?’ Between 1997 and 2002 we helped churches understand that it is our country and we are responsible for it; it is our people and our churches who need to deliver and give birth to other churches, and it is our responsibility to bring the Gospel to each man, woman and child and plant the churches. It is a huge vision and we need God’s help.”

*it is our country and we are responsible for it; it is our people and our churches who need to deliver and give birth to other churches*

An inflection point was created when, as a result of their work, the denominational leaders stopped working independently and agreed together on a national plan for 28,000 churches to be planted across Ukraine in their lifetime.

“Even today, they have pictures on their walls of the day where they signed the document,” remembers Chad Smith from the Antioch Movement. “They had never sat together at the table before – this was the first point of seeing a movement in this nation.”



The Antioch Movement’s vision is to see 28,000 churches planted across the Ukraine

## 2. Implementing the vision

It is one thing to create an outward focus; it’s another to put it into practice. The church-planting churches and networks featured have implemented their vision through adapting to change factors of major significance, facing the brutal facts about their organisation and deliberately changing their strategy to pursue a different direction – all key factors in creating an inflection point.

### **Responding to change**

A church planter now working with Good News Church in Belarus responded to a “change factor of major significance” several years ago, when the KGB closed his church. He had had a vision to start five churches and was praying with some friends, however he was aware that that his church was full of new believers who weren’t ready. Rather than stop the work when his church was closed, he joined with another established congregation “full of seasoned believers” and shared his vision for church planting.

*the inflection point came from starting to trust God we could begin new churches*

“We chose Dima to start a church in Minsk and another church planter who had a desire to start a church,” he says. “They became very successful. People began to understand that you could go out and do something different in our context. Before this they felt they were trapped into a traditional, unsuccessful method of doing church which was very inward-looking and legalistic. So for us, the inflection point came from stopping this model and starting to trust God we could begin new churches.”

They began to plan in 2005. One church was planted in 2006, another at the

beginning of 2007, and from then until January 2009, eight churches have began. In Belarus, churches must meet in a registered building. But not having a building has led to church-planting growth for several churches!

St Andrews Chorleywood ([www.st-andrews.org.uk](http://www.st-andrews.org.uk)) introduced MSCs (Mission Shaped Communities) in 2005 and, within a year, around 400 members of the congregation belonged to them. Then their main church building closed for renovation. Andrew Williams, associate vicar at the church, was told they would potentially lose three or four hundred church members. Instead they grew to 975 people, and the larger congregation didn't fit in the newly refurbished building! Andrew wanted to make sure the building didn't constrain growth – so the congregation adapted to the dispersed-gathered model, where they met out as Mission Shaped Communities for up to three Sundays a month and met together in one. Since then, this model has produced sustained growth, and there are now over 40 MSCs associated with St Andrews Chorleywood and a church family of around 1,600.

A lack of space also prompted Storsalen, Oslo ([www.storsalen.no](http://www.storsalen.no)) to think creatively about church planting, says Bertel Hjortland, leader of Storsalen's G2 celebration.

“We couldn't grow so much inside the church – we didn't have space. So, starting in 1997, we planted several independent congregations in the one building. Each one had a different style of service and allowed people to experiment and do new things. We grew from 300 people in one celebration to 800 people over two celebrations. Three years later we did the same thing with G3 and went from 800 to 1100.”

Although Storsalen had three congregations meeting in the one

building, the leadership found that some people were starting to disconnect with the main church “not because of lack of faith, but because of new circumstances or time of life,” says Bertel. “Some people had moved too far away from church and hadn't found a church where they were. We saw that they wanted to do something else, somewhere else.”



Members of one of Storsalen's mid-size groups

So the church has again adapted to circumstances through casting the vision of mid-size communities to people outside the church who were starting to disconnect. In one area, there are two or three families in an area meeting together as a celebration – with the potential to become a church plant in the next year.

### ***Facing the brutal facts***

A *Good to Great* principle behind companies becoming “great” is their ability to face the brutal facts about their organisation.

*Retain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be<sup>9</sup>*

Churches who face the brutal facts - like Storsalen who discovered people were disconnecting from the main celebrations – and who adapt to the changing reality find this provides acceleration for growth.

The Message Trust ([www.message.org.uk](http://www.message.org.uk)) had to face the brutal fact that the young people from the most deprived parts of Manchester who were coming to faith through their evangelistic outreach just didn't fit into "ordinary" church. Through this insight, Eden was born.

"We were an evangelistic organisation working in partnership with churches – all of a sudden we went from being solely evangelistic to also having discipleship and church planting," says executive director Matt Wilson.

The Message's incarnational model of church planting involves partnering with existing churches, or working together with denominational church-planting teams to create church in the most deprived urban areas. Eden workers and others move into the communities, sharing their lives as well as the Gospel.

"We got the first one off the ground and people in other parts of the city started relating to us and saying 'we've got a very similar context over here'. We did four plants in the first four years working in partnership with others – we weren't necessarily sitting and thinking that we were going to do this, but we got moving and gathered momentum."

There are now 10 Eden plants in Manchester. As well as planting more churches in Manchester, the next step is partnering with organisations in other cities around the UK to begin Eden projects there.

### ***Taking the time to refocus***

Facing the "brutal facts" can also mean taking time to stop and refocus, as St Thomas Philadelphia in Sheffield ([www.stthomaschurch.org.uk](http://www.stthomaschurch.org.uk)) found out. Several key leaders left between 2004 and 2006 and cluster (mid-size community) numbers declined, so senior leader Paul Maconochie called everyone back to the centre.

"This was one of a number of times when we have had to stop what we were doing and think again before we moved on," he says. "Ironically in 2006, when I was ill and off work for 6 months, I had time to reflect on what needed to change. We have seen consistent increasing growth ever since that time, with now at least 30 full-size clusters of between 35 and 50 people, and another 50 emerging with between 10 and 20 people that are already planted out.



*The Message Trust hold evangelistic events that attract many young people from across Manchester*

St Thomas Philadelphia was planted from the parish church of St Thomas Crookes ([www.stthomascrookes.org](http://www.stthomascrookes.org)) in 1999. According to St Thomas Crookes' Rector and team leader Mick Woodhead, most of the radical and progressive members left to go into the city and plant St Thomas Philadelphia, leaving mainly traditionalists and conservatives in the church. The brutal fact was that the remaining clusters had lost their vision and didn't see clusters as a missional vehicle, says Mick.

"We stopped meeting in clusters for a year, in order to re-envision them and give them focus. This was a major inflection point, in terms of our saying 'you are going to stop being the clusters you were six years ago and we are going to start looking for the new vision God has got for us.'"

***This was one of a number of times when we have had to stop what we were doing and think again before we moved on***

A brutal fact many churches have to face is that attractional church no longer works for them. For St Mathews Baptist Church ([www.matejs.lv](http://www.matejs.lv)) in Latvia, this has led to refocusing their church planting strategy. They are implementing the mid-size community model of church planting, however they have also had to change their attitude to the place of Sunday services.

“In the past, Sunday services were a priority and you never interfered with them in any way,” explains pastor Peteris Eisans. “The best time for us to do Alpha with athletes is a Sunday, when the church services are happening. Kaspars, who leads this work, always took part in our service. It is a change for the church to say no, it is not going to be a priority for Kaspars to be in the service – he has a ministry in another context. So we are stopping everybody having to attend Sunday services, and starting to be more flexible. It is a small step from the traditional way we do things.”

### 3. Building momentum

As the flywheel concept described earlier illustrates, taking “small steps from the traditional way we do things” helps to build momentum. Steps described by Jim Collins in *Good to Great* include getting “the right people on the bus”, finding your focus through “the hedgehog concept” and creating a culture of discipline. The church-planting churches and networks featured have also found that a culture of learning and accountability (tied in with that of discipline) is another small step towards building momentum.

#### Right people

One of the basic *Good to Great* principles is to get the “right people on the bus” by first of all asking “who” and then finding out the “what” of the vision.

*Those who build great organisations make sure they have the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the key seats before they figure out where to drive the bus.<sup>10</sup>*

The principle of needing the right people to lead is becoming increasingly clear for St Mathews Church in Latvia, as they transition to a mid-size community model.



*Kaspars and Peteris Eisans of St Mathews Church, Latvia*

“We say ‘let’s do mission groups’ and everybody is excited,” says Kaspars. “Then the next phase is to say ‘let’s start to do’ – and some people object. I understand they are not ready and do not see clearly because they are still looking for the old model. We understand now that ‘not everyone will come with me’ - so we are identifying key people who we see can be leaders in the future.”

One way to identify the right people for church planting is to look at it in terms of the fivefold ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4:11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These ministries are given by Christ “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (v12). But each ministry has a different function within the body of Christ, and some are more suited to the role of church planting than others.

In his book *The Passionate Church*<sup>11</sup>, Mike Breen categorises the five-fold ministries into pioneer and settler ministries.

Pioneers – the apostles, prophets and evangelists – *“enjoy change ... love breakthroughs and are always looking for the next frontier to explore and tame,”* writes Mike. *“In contrast, settlers, who are the pastors and teachers, are committed to continuity, stability and conservation.”*

It follows therefore that pioneers are more suited to the breakthrough work of church planting, whereas settlers are required to build on the pioneering work to create something which is lasting.

In the thirteen years since the Bulgarian Bible League began training church planters, over 30 groups have been trained and more than 400 churches have been planted, mainly within Baptist, Pentecostal, Church of God and independent denominations. Spaska Pantcheva, National Director of the Bulgarian Bible League, is keen to identify the right people to train as church planters. She is looking for people who have a vision to start new churches, rather than growing their existing congregation – the apostles, prophets and evangelists of Ephesians 4:11.

***settlers are required to build on the pioneering work to create something which is lasting***

But finding settlers to sustain a church plant after the initial planting phase is as important as finding pioneers to begin it in the first place “We saw many new churches planted, but the leaders who started the new churches could not continue to lead them,” she says. “They should not become pastors of the new churches. Instead they should raise up leaders, then keep on church planting.”

Paul Maconochie and his team at St Thomas Philadelphia have increased their effectiveness through spending time

getting the right people on the bus. In the last 3½ years their entire senior team has changed apart from Anne Maclaurin, the executive leader, and Paul. They now employ a cluster coordinator, freeing time that the senior strategic team previously used in day-to-day communication with the clusters. In addition, pastoral care takes place within the body of the church through prayer ministry teams and church members with counselling expertise and within the missional communities and small groups.

“A lot of churches are communities who have an organisation at their centre with the job of looking after the community through teaching and doing pastoral care. We said St Thomas’ needed to be a community of people who look after each other, with a mission organisation at the centre – in other words the job of the staff and church organisation is to train and resource mission. That has been a significant change in our culture” says Paul.



*Peicho Muhtraiv and Nikolay Ivanov of the Bulgarian Bible League are working with Spaska Pantcheva to identify people for church planting*

“We have seen an amazing change in the results – for example 2½ years ago we had about one hundred 14-18 year olds committed to our youth groups. We changed our youth worker – and now we have more like 450 people attending. We identified about 100 key leaders and while we were previously doing some training, this has become much more central.”

### ***Finding the 'hedgehog concept'***

The 'hedgehog concept' is defined by Jim Collins as a basic principle in creating a disciplined and focussed view of what an organisation is about.

*The Hedgehog concept is an operating model that reflects understanding of three intersecting circles: what you can be best in the world at, what you are deeply passionate about, and what best drives your economic or resource engine.<sup>12</sup>*

AAVM ([www.valgmenighed.dk](http://www.valgmenighed.dk)) in Arhus, was planted with a national vision, in the sense of inspiring national churches. They are in a city where people go for further education, so after studying, people move out into other churches around the country, consciously or unconsciously bringing AAVM's DNA with them.

Through exploring their hedgehog concept, they discovered they were best at raising leaders; they were deeply passionate about inspiring others and their resource engine was driven by their relational networks and the desire to give away what they had learnt.

Since 2007, AAVM has planted a new church in Copenhagen through clusters moving to the city. There are now beginnings of another 2 church plants elsewhere, as well as accelerated reproduction of their mid-size communities. The church already uses the mid-size cluster model of church planting in Arhus, which has provided a good basis for structuring how they plant nationally.

"All the principles for planting were experienced with mid-size clusters," says senior pastor Keld Dahlmann. "If we hadn't done this for years it is hard to see how we, with our history, could have taken the next step because it is not in Danish culture to church plant."

Holy Trinity Brompton ([www.htb.org.uk](http://www.htb.org.uk)) is passionate about playing their part in

the re-evangelisation of the nation and transformation of society. Over time however, their vision and supporting structures have expanded. To begin with they stopped thinking solely about being a parish church, and started thinking about church planting, in response to the fact that only a certain amount of growth can take place within the constraints of one community.

Next they stopped thinking about just church planting and started thinking about planting pregnant churches. All their curates are recruited on the basis of the fact they would like to church plant one day, and several HTB church plants have themselves planted other churches. More recently, HTB has started St Mellitus as part of the St Pauls Theological College, in order to train clergy and lay people in church planting, and they have also appointed a full-time Head of Church Planting.

***We said St Thomas' needed to be a community of people who look after each other, with a mission organisation at the centre***

### ***A culture of discipline***

Disciplined people (who include the right people on the bus) and disciplined thoughts (including facing the brutal facts and identifying your hedgehog concept) bring about disciplined actions, says Jim Collins. Disciplined actions occur in a culture of discipline which:

*Requires ... people who adhere to a consistent system; yet, on the other hand, it gives people freedom and responsibility within the framework of that system.<sup>13</sup>*

This description of a culture of discipline ties in closely with the culture of "low control, high accountability" used by many churches described in this paper. Cluster and mid-size community leaders

are free to follow the direction they feel God is leading them in, but they must be prepared to be accountable for what they do.

A culture of discipline is also related to ownership of the vision. When people buy into the vision, they are prepared to align their actions to achieving that vision's aims.

At St Thomas Crookes, ownership is created through making what is happening look and feel "real" with lots of story-telling and testimony. Senior leader Mick Woodhead also works hard at casting vision throughout the year, making it part of the annual rhythm of the church, and creating a consistent system within which people have the freedom to operate.

"The Sunday model is not enough – you can't say 'I have preached a good sermon, now everybody has got the vision.' You tell them, you tell them and you tell them – 8 or 9 different ways. And you know you have succeeded when somebody comes to church and says 'I've got this great idea', which is actually the vision you have been sharing with them for 4 months."

*ownership is created  
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'real'*

"We have two Vision Sundays each year - one in October to cast the vision for the next year, and one in March to give an update - did the money come in, here's some great testimonies of what people are doing, and so on."

Mick also invests time. "In the autumn my team and I visit every cluster in the church in their context and there is a presentation from me on the vision that we shared on Vision Sunday and the team are in their small groups with them asking questions. There is also a booklet that

goes out to everyone called a conversation – and the introduction says 'we have got to share the vision but then we have to own it.' People will give financially and give their time and effort if we own the vision. I am very happy to have lunch with people in their workplace to talk about the vision. In the autumn, we give a lot of time over to key people and invest in the clusters – because if they don't get the vision in the autumn, it is a pointless exercise in the next year."

Martin Cave, senior pastor at IMI Kirken ([www.imikirken.no](http://www.imikirken.no)) in Stavanger, Norway, and his team spent a year preparing to transition to mid-size communities.

"First I met with my whole staff and shared the idea with them," explains Martin. "We went through a whole learning community process, looking at *what is, what could be* and *what will be*. Then we took it to the board of elders and they embraced the idea, then we went to the whole church and introduced what we thought the Lord was taking us into."



*IMI Kirken's theme for the year is 'together for others'*

"We used Saddleback's *40 Days of Love* and launched the theme of 'together for others'. Now we do a lot of things to keep the focus, for example this year we dropped one Sunday service a month to give people time to buy into the mid-size communities. Mid-size communities have opened up the members to a new way of courage and expectancy."

Taking time helped to create the culture of discipline, says Martin. “We launched in January last year, and in one year we have 35 mid-size communities. The whole church has embraced this way of thinking regarding church planting through missional communities – there have been no splits or rejection.

“Through adopting the G12 model of church a few years ago, we were trained for mission and given skills on how to run groups and how to relate to outsiders. But we had a church that was very strong on cells and celebration – the mid-size community was the missing part. We saw mid-size communities as a tool to see mission completed.”

*Taking time helped to create the culture of discipline*

The cell groups and mid-size communities along with the staff team have been involved in acts of kindness and praying for others. In common with many of the church planters featured in this paper, the sense of ownership by IMI Kirken’s congregation is maintained through telling stories of what God is doing through their ministry.

“I think we will increase the arena for the kingdom to be experienced and when people hear the testimonies and about people coming to Christ, they are thrilled and enthusiastic,” says Martin.

For Marcus Hausner from Vineyard D.A.CH, a culture of discipline also means keeping Vineyard values and ethos consistent through what they do “We say ‘No’ to stuff that is not aligned with our values,” says Marcus. “We explain that we don’t do things one way, we choose to do it the other way based on our calling, vision and values. If we don’t have this kind of discussion, our communication to others and the resources don’t make any sense because there is no longer a

common language or similar standards when it comes to leadership.”

***Creating an action learning culture***

The learning community principles used by the teams within the context of the European Church Planting Network (ECPN) have been taken back to their churches and organisations. Growth arising from the culture of discipline has been accelerated through implementing these principles of an action learning culture, goal setting and accountability.



Keld Dahlmann of AAVM (pictured) sees every staff meeting as a ‘gathering’ and intentionally goes through the process of ‘what is, what could be and what will be’

“In the last two years we have become much more efficient as an organisation,” says Paul Maconachie from St Thomas Philadelphia. “We do a mini learning community with all our missional community leaders and they are accountable to each other, with six monthly measurable goals. You have to attend. So even if you are leading a pastoral missional community in a suburb, with a general remit to bring the love of Jesus to that suburb, you are still having to bring achievable measurable goals of how you are going to move it forward over the next six months – even if it is something like ‘everyone in our street is going to know each other’s name in the next six months.’ This has created a lot of forward momentum in the church, and the general feedback from the teams is that they feel more valued than before.”

Andrew Williams from St Andrews agrees. “We have been encouraged to pray harder and strategise harder. By

committing yourselves to measurable goals, we look with much more focus and intent on entrepreneurial opportunities that come up. Before we might have been busy and said 'if a good thing comes along we will look at it'. Now we are much more focused in looking at what God is doing and running after that. I ask my department heads for their 6 month measureable goals and how are they going to measure success, and it has been enormously stimulating."

*when you stand here and say 'we are going to do this' it helps to make it happen*

AAVM now apply the learning community principles throughout the church culture, including with the cluster leaders and on staff retreat days.

"We intentionally go through the whole process of 'what is, what could be and what will be'," says senior Pastor Keld Dahlmann. "We try to get the dynamic

going where participants are learning from one another much more than just being informed. Having goals makes you accountable which has also helped. We can talk about it for five years and not do anything, but when you stand here and say 'we are going to do this' it helps to make it happen."

"When I go into a meeting, I have stopped having the attitude of 'this is the result I am going for, this is the information I want to give to the staff.' Instead I see every meeting as a 'gathering'."

#### 4. National & international influence

The churches and networks featured in this paper are growing in their influence. For example, the Bulgarian Bible League is partnering with a Bulgarian missionary in Spain to plant churches amongst the large numbers of Bulgarian immigrants living there. The Antioch Movement has already planted seventeen churches for Ukrainians in Portugal and is implementing their vision to reach Russian speaking Europe.

#### **Learning community principles used at ECPN learning communities.**

The aim is to move from knowledge to understanding to action and decision – what you are going to do in light of the information you have gained.

You create inflection points through deciding what you are going to stop doing, and what you are going to start.

Ask three questions:

**What is** – what has occurred over the last 6 months?

**What could be** – new ideas and imagine the possibilities

**What will be** – planning and decide on what to do based on the information you get on our time together

The following attitudes are required:

**Presence** – you need to be present and actively participating.

**Teacher/learner** – you can teach people what you know, and learn from others who have expertise.

**Honest conversation** – don't just tell everyone what they want to hear; have honest conversations.

**Discovery** – learn from models that are very different and ask 'why is that working and what is the genius in the idea and principle behind the model?'

### **Decentralisation**

The latest inflection point for the Antioch Movement is in changing from a centralised to decentralised structure. They originally intended that training would take place within the denominations, however the leadership quickly realised that the denominational structures would not facilitate the system of training they needed to develop a multiplication-type model. They used central training as a way to start dealing with “reformational issues of church and leadership.”

After two years, Antioch once again changed the training focus and began to decentralise.

“Stopping central training was a huge inflection point,” says Chad Smith, a member of the Antioch Movement’s team. “Our job became coaching these teams through the process of starting their own training centres, and more churches could come into the training. When we ended the central training, sixty groups had gone through in two years. In the first year of churches training in their own centres, seventy groups had been trained.”

The next stage will be to intentionally send missionaries to the Russian-speaking world. “We are putting more obligation and responsibility onto the teams in the oblasts than the national team has the capacity to do,” explains Victor Kulbich. “The regional teams will do the planting, and we will do the training in Russian rather than using an English speaker to do it. There will be a much more indigenous feel to it.”

Vineyard D.A.CH has also used decentralisation to help realise their aim of reaching 1% of the population of German-speaking Europe. The movement was initially centred in their flagship church in Bern where 1200 people gather together to worship.

“We gave the regions more ownership and stopped the central control in order to facilitate a mode where we are not one movement, but rather a movement of movements,” explains Marcus Hausner. “We created nine regions and formed the Vineyard Council, then called regional coordinators who have executive leadership authority over regions. We want to see spiritual entrepreneurship on a local or regional level where people can follow what God has given them on their heart.” Marcus recognises however the need for a balance between giving the freedom to take opportunities locally, whilst providing direction that helps build momentum.

Dispersed clusters at St Thomas Crookes’ are gaining momentum. They primarily reach students, young adults and families, and differ from gathered clusters in that they are planted in the sub-culture they are reaching. According to Mick Woodhead, team leader at St Thomas Crookes, dispersed clusters are beginning to become a movement in their own right. “We are getting to the point where we need a new hub and sending centre, and I think the key to that will be the dispersed clusters,” he says.

***We want to see spiritual entrepreneurship on a local or regional level where people can follow what God has given them on their heart***

The Message Trust are decentralising through their plans to take Eden into other cities.

“As we looked to what happened in Manchester, we could see a real strength in having multiple plants in the same city where they can relate to each other. As it goes national we will take a city by city approach, but we want to be locally

driven. Manchester is just a template for what could happen in other cities,” says Matt Wilson.

### **Strategic partnerships**

The Message Trust also view partnerships as an essential part of their vision to move into other cities. For example, they are working with Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) to bring Eden to London. And HTB are extending their vision of theological education through partnerships with churches in northern England.

In southern Germany, ejw’s strategic partnership with Young Life ([www.younglife.org](http://www.younglife.org)) has led to openings in schools work and three new groups beginning.

A new party within the regional church of Württemberg is also gaining wider influence through having seats on the regional church synod. “In 2001 this new church party had two seats – and then in 2007 gained seven, all the others declining a little,” says Reinhold Krebs. “It really changed people’s minds so they began to take the movement around fresh expressions of church much more seriously. Now one of the central topics of the annual retreat of the church government is new churches.”

### **Technology acceleration**

Together with others, Reinhold has written a book about ejw’s experiences of the last 10 years, which will make the topic “even more public”. They also work hard on an internet platform to cast the vision of youth services and planting churches to a wider audience.



*The cover of ejw’s book about their experiences of planting youth churches*

With over 200 youth services taking place in the region, there are large numbers who can be influenced to become part of the church-planting movement.

*“When used right, technology becomes an accelerator of momentum, not a creator of it,”* says Jim Collins.<sup>14</sup> Churches and organisations use websites or videos to share testimonies and stories of God at work as a means of creating ownership, and dedicated areas on their website for church planters and cluster leaders to give feedback and share ideas.

The Message Trust share their vision with staff through weekly meetings and a prayer day once a month. “The stories fuel people’s faith and often that is when God speaks to us as a community,” says executive director Andy Hawthorne. “Podcasts of our meetings are now in the top ten religious downloads on itunes, because they have high vision and teaching content.”

### ***The stories fuel people’s faith and often that is when God speaks to use as a community***

According to Collins, technology is most effective when it links to the Hedgehog concept. For Vineyard D.A.CH, facilitating church planting is a key part of who they are as an organisation. A newly established web portal with motivational and practical information about church planting helps fulfil this aim.

“At least ten potential church planters bump into this portal each week,” says Marcus Hausner. “They are saying ‘this is cool, this is interesting; I am really thinking about church planting because God has told me.’ We are building up a database where we will provide them with newsletters and information about seminars and the opportunity to receive mentoring. So far, this is unique in Germany – so people who are already

part of Vineyard, or others who feel inspired bump into this and feel inspired. It has really catalysed the whole process of finding church planters.”

### ***National learning communities***

While many of the church-planting churches and networks are using learning community principles within their own contexts, several have also begun regional learning communities. In Belarus, the vision for church planting is expanding.

“We want to use our six monthly conferences like a ladder to develop leaders and encourage people to plan new churches,” says Dima, “and to inspire people to have the confidence to grow their church, then develop the DNA that is planted in their church and start planting another church.



*Learning community-style conferences ‘help develop leaders and encourage people to plan new churches’, says Dima from Belarus*

“In Russian, we have three *Rs* which translate as you are born again, then you grow and then you give birth again. As soon as you are born again, it is time to grow, and while you are growing it leads you to give new life. We will be doing a learning community where our potential church planters will meet together to plan their church plant.”

AAVM’s Hedgehog Concept includes inspiring others, and giving away what they have learnt. They are using the learning community concept with thirteen other Danish churches spanning six denominations, in order to disseminate

mid-size community principles throughout church culture. “The learning community is about the ability to grow and reproduce mid-size communities,” explains Keld Dahlmann. “On a national scale people were coming to us and saying ‘How, why’ and we were trying to do the most effective thing to do this. We think some of these churches will move into church planting or becoming multi-site churches, but mid-size communities are a good starting point for Danish settler culture.”

UK churches were coming to St Andrews Chorleywood with the same ‘Why, how’ questions about mission-shaped communities. Andrew Williams quickly realised they couldn’t respond to the requests for information on an ad hoc basis, so they started running conferences, and they are now planning to set up learning communities to share best practice, bring in key speakers, help the churches to strategise and be accountable for their growth. Their influence is extending internationally as well - a church plant in Brazil has just launched four mission-shaped communities (called CEM in Brazil)

“The idea of giving mission-shaped community leaders that level of responsibility and ownership is new in Brazil. The church grew to 90 people, and realised that if they continued in the conventional way, they would cap their growth. By raising up new leaders to lead missional communities, they have released the potential of significantly more growth. In simple terms there is only ever so much growth that will arise around a single pulpit.’

Andy Hawthorne and Matt Wilson of the Message Trust believe that what has happened in Manchester in terms of church planting is just a template of what could happen in other UK cities. “God wants us to be in our own identities as innovators – to be people who are addressing problems that other people

are not tackling – not for the sake of being first, but it seems like we get drawn into things before other people do,” explains Andy.

***God wants us to be in our own identities as innovators – to be people who are addressing problems that other people are not tackling***

“ We have a dream of seeing another 100 churches planted for Manchester, and through our learning community Agenda 1, to influence church planters across the UK. The inflection point came from realising that Eden alone is not the model. We will put our energies into Eden, but we will also gather together a broader group of key leaders who can develop their own models for their own contexts and so get a second burst of church planting that is not constrained to only one model.”



*AAVM's first learning community is helping key leaders from six different denominations in Denmark make the transfer to becoming church-planting congregations*

### **Conclusion**

The churches and networks described in this paper are responding to the diverse environments God has placed them in. Growth has come from taking strategic decisions fuelled by prayer and obedience to the calling of God on their organisation.

From creating an outward focus to having a national and international influence, they are motivated by the passion to see peoples and nations won for Christ. They are prepared to ask the hard questions and make the difficult decisions in order to move from being good at church planting to being great.

Are we?

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Collins, Jim (2001) *Good to Great* Random House Business Books

<sup>2</sup> Collins, Jim (2006) *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* Random House Business Books

<sup>3</sup> Collins, Jim (2001) *Good to Great* Random House Business Books p165

<sup>4</sup> From the preface to Grove's book *Only the Paranoid Survive*  
<http://www.intel.com/pressroom/kits/bios/grove/paranoid.htm>

<sup>5</sup> From BNET business dictionary  
<http://dictionary.bnet.com/definition/strategic+inflection+point.html>

<sup>6</sup> D.A.CH stands for Germany, Austria and Switzerland

<sup>7</sup> You can read more about Vineyard D.A.CH's East Berlin church plant in the ECPN concept paper *Church Planting*

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*in Historical Reformation Churches in Europe* available for download from [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org)

<sup>8</sup> Dwight Smith, Founder of Saturation Church Planting International, quoted on the United World Mission website: <http://www.uwm.org/mski-SCP.htm>

"I begin with the assumption that the local church is God's number one instrument for world evangelization. This means that all other human administrative structures, be they denominational or non-denominational, are para-church by nature and must be required to assist local churches into direct involvement in all domains of Gospel extension. It is the responsibility of the local church to reach the neighborhood in which it is located. It is the responsibility of the local church to see churches planted among the ethnic people in its own country. Any other process that alienates local churches from direct involvement in world evangelization, no matter how logistically difficult this emphasis may be, deprives the local church of its very purpose of existence. Additionally, not only is the local church God's number one instrument for world evangelization, it is the church's number one priority. All other activity must render accountability and

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bend to the primacy of the extension of the Gospel through the local church."

<sup>9</sup> Collins, Jim (2006) *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* Random House Business Books p34

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> Breen, Mike and Kallestad, Walt (2005) *The Passionate Church* Cook Communications Ministries p150

<sup>12</sup> Collins, Jim (2006) *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* Random House Business Books p34

<sup>13</sup> Collins, Jim (2001) *Good to Great* Random House Business Books p143

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p152

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